

## Clinton Economics May Boost Environmental Protection

President Clinton's original \$16-million economic stimulus program highlighted childhood immunization and summer jobs but it also contains funding for environmental protection programs. The entire proposal met with stiff Republican resistance in the Senate on the grounds that it would contribute to the federal budget deficit and would have minimal impact on the overall American economy. The deadlock in the Senate was assured when a Republican filibuster prevented a vote on either the original proposal or a scaled-down version with \$4 million in programs removed.

Environmental programs slated for acceleration under the stimulus package included wastewater treatment plant construction, watershed management projects, and improved energy efficiency. Nearly \$1 billion would be appropriated immediately for these efforts if Congress approves the package. In the case of the wastewater treatment construction, some of the local cost-sharing requirements would be lifted so that work could begin quickly.

Republicans targeted these environmental projects in their opposition to the president's proposal. They say that the number of jobs created by these programs is much smaller than claimed by the

administration. The reaction of environmentalists was mixed. There was support for the concept linking environmental protection, job creation, and economic stimulus; however, the plan was criticized for being too small. Environmentalists were also put off by the president's proposal to help reduce the deficit by cutting staff at EPA and reducing expenditures from the Superfund trust fund.

## Assessing Risk Assessment

A report that evaluates federal research programs in risk assessment methodology was submitted to Congress in May. The report, prepared by the Office of Technology Assessment, will provide lawmakers with vital information and suggestions for future legislative actions and funding decisions in this area. Congressman George Brown, chair of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, and Congressman John Dingell, chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, requested the report.

According to Dalton Paxman, project director of the Biological and Behavioral Sciences Program of the OTA, the office, aided by a 15-member panel of scientific experts from around the country, was given a "nonpartisan, objective mandate" by Congress to survey federal research

activities in risk assessment. Paxman added that although the OTA staff has talked to many agencies, "up to 11 are defined as having programs." Some of the agencies include EPA, FDA, NIEHS, CDC, National Cancer Institute, Department of Energy, Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

The survey, which describes the federal programs, also attempts to identify the programs' priorities and the ways in which their research has helped to improve risk assessment. An initial draft of the report was sent in December to 100 individuals both inside and outside of the agencies for review. Paxman said that neither congressional requestors nor OTA staff anticipated that the research would be controversial but found that it was. "People claimed that the report was biased towards industry and [some] towards environmentalists." The panel has made an attempt to incorporate the reviewers' comments into the report that went to the Technology Assessment Board, a group of 12 members of Congress who oversee the OTA. If approved, the report, which Paxman hopes will "create an atmosphere for collaboration," is expected to be published by the end of the summer.

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